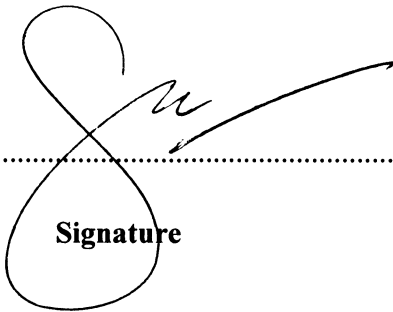


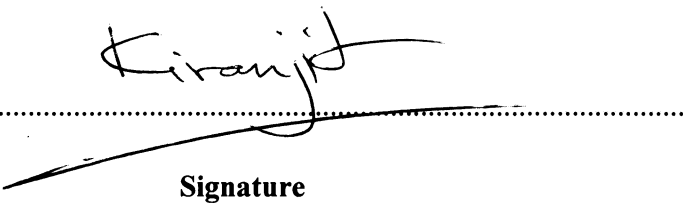
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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICAL CODES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY  
IN THE COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONS IN MALAYSIA**



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# AN ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICAL CODES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY IN THE COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONS IN MALAYSIA

## *Abstract*

*Studying media ethics and the ethical codes of the various media professions is an attempt to better understand the workings and conduct of the mass media which play a significant role in society. Like any other profession whose activities affect the public, the media too are bound by formal and informal controls. Part of the informal controls, codes of ethics, when formulated, were significantly influenced by the codes of more established media professions, particularly in the West. While taking a leaf out of the Western codes may give the local codes a more universal outlook, there is also concern that they may not adequately address the cultural and parochial realities that exist in this multiethnic society. Thus, this research hopes to study the suitability and applicability of the codes, not just in the context of multiculturalism, but also against international standards.*

*Because of its informal nature, the codes of media ethics in Malaysia have been criticised as 'lacking punch'. Due to that, adherence to and observance of the codes is voluntary. A review of the codes and the findings may help the various professions to strengthen the codes and their utility; and subsequently lend some credibility and respectability to the media professions.*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of ethics in the realm of communication and media has always been an important social component since media play a significant role in the public sphere. Society has been concerned with media ethics, particularly with the increase of media violations over the years. Media conduct in the private lives of public figures, for instance, has triggered interest in the workings and performance of the media. Concern over media professionalism has started an ongoing debate about various ethical issues among them being the public's right to know versus the individual's right to privacy or whether the ends (the public's right to know) justify the means (for instance, snooping, sneaking and lying).

The uncovering of a phone-hacking scandal and hints of misconduct in Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and *News of the World* in July 2011 has triggered and renewed a global concern about media ethics. The *News of the World* is alleged to have hacked up to 4,000 telephones, including that of a murdered 13-year old girl. The scandal released a can of worms, which included allegations that police officers had accepted money from the tabloid and had not done enough to investigate hacking charges that surfaced as far back as 2005 (*Today's Zaman*, July 19, 2011). Another such example is the online hacking by Julian Assange's Wikileaks case for journalistic information. Media ethics continue to be violated, and thus discourses on ethical standards and codes are pertinent.

The incident of hacking and bribery by Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World*, media ownership concentrated in the hands of a few media moguls or media, which has strong political affiliation provide a challenge to the application of the codes of ethics by media practitioners.

Closer to home, the subject and scholarship on media ethics, though not new, is not well explored. Discussions on ethics follow a trend, which are only in vogue when members of society broach the subject in reaction to a media organization, or a media worker is perceived as having infringed an accepted cultural norm. Then, there would be calls from various quarters for the media to act with more 'decorum.' The public today has become the watchdog of the media and would not hesitate to discuss and